How Stereotypes of African-American Women in Oscar-Winning Film Roles Have Changed from 1939 to 2006

Katreena E. Alder
Faculty Mentor: Dr. David Leon

Abstract

Receiving the movie industry’s highest honor, the Oscar, comes with the gifts of fame and recognition. African-American female Oscar winners also receive a special gift: awareness of their unique and sometimes controversial place in history, culture, and society. Since 1939, four African-American women have won the Oscar. This study examines their winning roles and the evolution of racial stereotypes within these celebrated films.

African-American actresses work in a society where stereotypes are prevalent, enduring, and exist both on and off the movie screen. A stereotype is defined as “unreliable, exaggerated generalizations about all members of a group that do not take individual differences into account” (Schaefer 2008). D.W. Griffith’s Birth of a Nation (1915) is the first full-length feature film that presented unrealistic and critical stereotypes of African-Americans to the general public. Bogle (1996) argued that it was well-received by white audiences by stating:

This extraordinary, multidimensional movie was also the first feature film to deal with a black theme…Griffith presented all the types with such force and power that his film touched off a wave of controversy and was denounced as the most slanderous anti-Negro movie ever released (9).

Although it was not the first film to portray African-American stereotypes, it was certainly the longest and most widely viewed, and those three hours are among the longest in African-American film history.

This research seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge and extend prior research with new theories and analysis about stereotypes of African-American women in film, with specific focus on African-American women who have won Oscars. A vast amount of research in the field of black stereotypes in film was conducted by Donald Bogle, and as such he is an integral part of the foundation of this current research. The research is guided by the following questions: What stereotypes of African-American women existed in films? Which stereotypes are present today? How have these stereotypes changed in Oscar-winning movie roles from 1939 to 2006?
African-American women have been starring in films since early in the 20th century and have navigated all types of roles. They have played the “Mammy” character, the sexual creature, the welfare mother, the strong, matriarchal, African-American woman and many more in between. The purpose of this research is to review and analyze the four roles (Hattie McDaniel for *Gone with the Wind* in 1939, Whoopi Goldberg for *Ghost* in 1990, Halle Berry for *Monster's Ball* in 2002, and Jennifer Hudson for *Dreamgirls* in 2006), that resulted in an African-American woman’s Oscar win and to understand how the roles have changed. The academy’s highest acting honor has historically gone to only four African-American women, three of them (Hattie McDaniel, Whoopi Goldberg, and Jennifer Hudson) have won for Best Actress in a Supporting Role and one of them (Halle Berry) won for Best Actress in a Leading Role. Hattie McDaniel has the distinction of being the first African-American to win an Oscar, male or female. She won for her portrayal of Mammy in the film *Gone with the Wind* (1939). Her commitment to her roles throughout her career, all while being limited to playing the maid, Mammy, or sexual deviant, is remarkable given the time period she lived in and its societal limitations.

More than 50 years later, Whoopi Goldberg was the next African-American woman to win an Oscar; she won it for her role in *Ghost* (1990). Prior to Goldberg’s victory she had been nominated for the Best Actress in a Leading Role Oscar for her portrayal of Celie in *The Color Purple* (1985). She is the only African-American actress to be nominated for Oscars in the two categories of Best Actress in a Leading Role and Best Actress in a Supporting Role. During this 50-year time period, numerous films were released that introduced new genres of films depicting blacks. The 1960s was the era of integration where African-American men became leading men (i.e., Sidney Poitier). The 1970s was the decade when African-American men and women were exploited in what are called “Blaxploitation” films, and the early 1980s began an era of African-Americans becoming prominent directors, producers, and writers (Bogle 1996). Whoopi Goldberg won her Oscar in 1990; it was more than ten years later when Halle Berry won hers in 2001.

Halle Berry too made history when she became the first African-American woman to win an Oscar for Best Actress in a Leading Role. This is significant because only seven African-American women have been nominated for Best Actress in a Leading Role in the 81 year history of the Oscars, beginning with Dorothy Dandridge’s nomination in 1954. Halle Berry had been acting for more than 10 years when she won her Oscar. She played a number of roles prior to her role as Leticia in *Monster's Ball*, including *Introducing Dorothy Dandridge* (1998) where she earned her Emmy and Golden Globe awards for playing the title character.
Jennifer Hudson was the fourth and most recent African-American actress to win an Oscar. She won the Oscar for Best Actress in a Supporting Role for her portrayal of Effie White in *Dreamgirls* (2006). Unlike McDaniel, Goldberg, and Berry, Hudson was not well-known or an experienced film actress at the time of her win. She was best known for having competed on the reality TV show *American Idol* in 2004, but was eliminated. For her debut role in *Dreamgirls*, she went on to win three of the top awards in the acting industry that year: an Oscar for Best Supporting Actress, a Golden Globe, and a Screen Actors Guild Award.

**PURPOSE STATEMENT**

The purpose of this research is to analyze the characters played by the actresses Hattie McDaniel, Whoopi Goldberg, Halle Berry, and Jennifer Hudson in their Oscar-winning roles. This research seeks to define what stereotypes are present in these roles and how those stereotypes have changed over time. Prior research has dictated the definitions of these stereotypes, but this research seeks to extend that research and understand the evolution of these stereotypes within the context of these films. In 81 years and across dozens of other roles portrayed by African-American women, the Academy of Motion Pictures, Arts, and Sciences has only awarded four Oscars to African-American women, even though a total of 20 African-American have been nominated for Oscars. The four historical wins came in the 20th and 21st centuries, and each showed some form or variation of the following stereotypes: the Sapphire, the Jezebel, the Mammy, and the Tragic Mulatta. These stereotypes will be defined and analyzed in the next section. The four identified films will be compared to one another and analyzed to see what stereotypes and perceptions have remained unchanged in Hollywood. The historical roots of these stereotypes may help to explain how these stereotypes have persisted into the 21st century and continue to paint an inaccurate picture of African-American women’s intelligence, attitudes, and sexuality. For the purposes of this research, the terms “African-American” and “black” are used interchangeably to refer to the group of individuals of African, non-Hispanic descent.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review will cover the historical journey of African-American female stereotypes in film. The stereotypes portrayed in films have a long history and instead of diminishing with time, they seem to adapt with the changing times. Identified stereotyped will be defined to help understand the context of their usage in this research. This review will also examine the
Oscar-winning roles of Hattie McDaniel, Whoopi Goldberg, Halle Berry, and Jennifer Hudson as Oscar-winning roles for African-American women have gone through many changes since Hattie McDaniel’s historical Oscar win for her role in *Gone with the Wind* (1939).

Stereotypes of African-American Women
Charisse Jones and Dr. Kumea Shorter-Gooden conducted the largest, most comprehensive study of black women in America and their experiences in *The African-American Women’s Voices Project* (Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2004). They spoke to the experience of African-American women and a phenomenon known as *shifting*, which refers to one’s ability to “shift to accommodate differences in class as well as gender and ethnicity from one moment to the next” (Jones and Shorter-Gooden, 2004). Their research focuses on an area that is largely unexplored and undocumented. Shifting generally occurs for women outside of their home in places where they can come in contact with someone who may perceive or assume them to be a certain way. The researchers state:

> While most people of color, and African-Americans in particular, are perceived through a distorted lens, black women are routinely defined by a specific set of grotesque caricatures that are reductive, inaccurate, and unfair. bell hooks of the City College of New York enumerates that these ‘gendered stereotypes’ that include the emasculating Sapphire, the desexualized Mammy, and the scheming temptress Jezebel (Jones and Gooden 2004, 3).

When viewed in this manner, African-American women’s options have been limited to these very small, specifically designed labels of womanhood. It can be difficult for a woman to find her own true self given these distorted images found in television, films, magazines, and music. Shifting affects black women in more than just daily life; it can be a hindrance to their self-image, attitude, and health over the long term (Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2004).

*The Sapphire*

The Sapphire stereotype is relatable for black women off-screen because even though parts of it are viewed negatively, not all black women view it that way. Jones and Shorter-Gooden state that, “Sapphire is harsh, loud, uncouth, usually making the other characters seem more professional, more charming, more polished by contrast. She is a twisted take on the myth that black women are invulnerable and indefatigable, that they always persevere and endure against great odds without being negatively affected” (2004). This interpretation is problematic because in film the Sapphire is shown to the white audience and may be perceived to be a chosen way of life for black
women, but given its distorted takes on reality it is not accurate. The Sapphire was created in the 1950s radio-turned-television-show *Amos ’n’ Andy* (1951) where Ernestine Wade played a character by the name of Sapphire (Show History of Amos ‘N’ Andy, n.d.). Historically, the image of the Sapphire has been that of an emasculating woman. She is a no-nonsense and bossy woman who takes charge over those around her. Within that context, she is an on-screen image who repeatedly appears in the films and is easily identifiable. She is not physically described to look a particular way, instead she is characterized in her actions and behavior.

*The Jezebel*

The *Jezebel* is seen as a scheming and wicked woman. She chases after men and is viewed to be sexually immoral. She is a distorted image taken from the pre-Civil War times of the slave women and how they were viewed by their white oppressors (Pilgrim 2002). Much of their appearance in slave times was connected to their method of trying to survive in an unfamiliar climate and being treated harshly. This image is one that has been around for centuries and stems from the female slaves’ sensuality and sexuality as defined by slave owners of that time (Pilgrim, 2002). The Jezebel stereotype is not specific to any particular race as it has been around since biblical times. It generally applies to whomever fits the definition. There is a belief that the Jezebel combines the Tragic Mulatta (defined later in this section) and sensuality but for the purposes of the current research, it is defined and pertains specifically to African-American women. Pilgrim’s description of the term as defined here is the most easily identifiable in the films reviewed, and so it is used for this current research.

Bogle on Stereotypes in Film

The stereotypes portrayed in film have a broad audience and show certain perceptions of African-American women. The foremost expert in the field of the portrayal of African-Americans in film is Donald Bogle. His book, *Toms, Coon, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks* (1973) helps to examine what stereotypes are present in films. His observations help the researcher understand stereotypes in many films with particular attention paid to the following Oscar-winning films: *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *Ghost* (1990), *Monster’s Ball* (2002) and *Dreamgirls* (2006). In his book, Bogle briefly discusses *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *Ghost* (1990), *Monster’s Ball* (2001) and the Mammy, Tragic Mulatta, and Sapphire stereotypes that he observed in those films. Bogle speaks extensively about the origins of stereotypes in films and about one of the first films that brought many of them to white audiences: *Birth of a Nation* (1915).
Oscar-winning films receive a lot of attention and are seen by millions of people, so after a film wins, it is important to analyze the characters being portrayed in the film. Bogle believes that there were five major stereotypes present in cinema in the 20th century: the Tom, Coon, Buck, Mulatta, and Mammy. Three of the stereotypes (Tom, Coon, and Buck) apply to African-American males; however, for the purposes of this research the Mammy and Mulatta stereotypes that apply to African-American women will be explored and discussed.

The Mammy

Mammy was a strong stereotype first seen in the early 20th century, and was portrayed as a happy and jolly character. According to Bogle (2003), “Mammy…, is so closely related to the comic coons that she is usually relegated to their ranks. Mammy is distinguished, however, by her sex and fierce independence. She is usually big, fat, and cantankerous. She made her debut around 1914 when audiences were treated to a blackface version of Lysistrata” (9). The Mammy was a staple in films and made most famous by three actresses: Hattie McDaniel, Ethel Waters, and Louise Beavers, the most famous of them being Hattie McDaniel. Hattie McDaniel won an Oscar for Best Actress in a Supporting Role for her role in Gone with the Wind (1939) and revolutionized what it meant to play the Mammy character. Prior to McDaniel’s portrayal, the Mammy had been viewed as content in her role and was given no personality. McDaniel’s scene-stealing Mammy oozed with personality and definitely modified her given parameters.

Historically, the image of the Mammy or how it later came to be defined made its appearance in early Civil War writings. She was essentially viewed to be what Southern white slave owners created to appease their consciences and show that slaves were not unhappy. As explained by Pilgrim (2000), “Her wide grin, hearty laughter, and loyal servitude were offered as evidence of the supposed humanity of the institution of slavery” (Pilgrim 2000). If she looked happy and well-fed then the underlying message was that slavery must not be all that bad. In actuality, there is not much historical evidence to support this image and whether it truly existed. House slaves were often not well-fed and physically did not look the way the Mammy is portrayed. The Mammy character was a caretaker who was seen as asexual and unattractive. Her loyalty to her slave-owner’s family and the responsibility she had in raising his children were key elements in her portrayal, making her a nurturing figure as well.

The Tragic Mulatta

The Tragic Mulatta was another strong image that came about during the time the Mammy character was popularized. As Bogle explained:
The third figure of the black pantheon and the one that proved itself the moviemaker’s darling is the Tragic Mulatta... Usually the mulatto is made likeable—even sympathetic (because of her white blood, no doubt)—and the audience believes that the girl’s life could have been productive and happy had she not been a ‘victim’ of divided racial inheritance (9).

Essentially, the Tragic Mulatta was the complete opposite of the Mammy: delicate, fair-skinned, and the victim. However, the Tragic Mulatta, although seen as the victim and separate from the Mammy, more closely resembles what a house slave looked like than the Mammy did. There is more evidence to support the statement that a house slave resembled the Tragic Mulatta more than the Mammy (Pilgrim, 2000). A famous actress in the 1920s known for playing the Tragic Mulatta was Nina Mae McKinney. At the young age of seventeen she landed a starring role in the black-produced musical Hallelujah (1929). Within the context of this research, the Tragic Mulatta is one of the more physically recognizable stereotypes viewed in the films and also one of the most seldom seen.

Oscar-winning Roles for African-American Women

The four films discussed here all featured African-American actresses who won Oscars for their roles in the films.

*Gone with the Wind* (1939)

Hattie McDaniel set the standard for her portrayal of Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* (1939). She made history by becoming the first African-American to win an Oscar, a feat that would not be duplicated by another African-American actor until Sidney Poitier became the first African-American male to win an Oscar in 1965. Ms. McDaniel would be the only Oscar-winning African-American woman for more than 50 years until Whoopi Goldberg reached the same success in 1990 with her film *Ghost*. Hattie McDaniel played a role written to fit the stereotypical depiction of the Mammy. She was physically seen as de-sexualized, jolly, fiercely independent, and loyal to her master and his family. McDaniel’s portrayal set a new standard for portraying this stereotypical role. She was confident, strong-willed, outspoken, assertive, and efficient, all while playing a stereotype created to appease white guilt after the end of slavery. Historically, the Mammy, who was representative of a house slave, was not created until after the Civil War (Pilgrim 2000). The image of the Mammy was meant to portray a happy slave who is proud to serve her master and his family.
**Ghost (1990)**

The film *Ghost* is about a man (played by actor Patrick Swayze) who is murdered and becomes a ghost to solve his murder and help keep his fiancée safe. Whoopi Goldberg received an Oscar for Best Actress in a Supporting Role for *Ghost* (1990). In the film, Whoopi Goldberg played the character of Oda Mae Brown, a con-artist who pretends to possess psychic powers, only to discover that she really does have supernatural abilities. Whoopi Goldberg’s portrayal includes the Mammy and Sapphire stereotypes, and is unlike any of the others analyzed in this literature review.

Oda Mae starts the film as a con-artist who has a criminal record. She comes to know the ghost of Patrick Swayze but does not want to help him. This immediately sets her apart from the traditional Mammy role because Oda Mae is visually leery of helping Swayze’s character and wants no part of it. She is completely against the idea of helping a ghost and repeatedly tries to ignore Swayze’s character. However, because of his persistence and refusal to leave her alone, Oda Mae eventually agrees to help him and becomes committed to his cause. She displays the loyalty that Mammy’s possess and even goes as far as putting her life on the line for Swayze’s character’s fiancé (played by Demi Moore). She portrayed the role of the Mammy with strength and an independent streak, but again she was not labeled that way to begin with because she transitioned into that role during the film. In her role, Goldberg fits the Sapphire stereotype based on her loud mouth and uncouth behaviors. There are scenes where she is depicted in such a manner that it makes all of her counterparts look better than she does. Those scenes are shot to downplay her own attitude and abilities in order to smoothly handle a bank transaction. A more detailed analysis can be found in the Results and Discussion section.

**Monster’s Ball (2001)**

Halle Berry’s portrayal of Leticia Musgrove in *Monster’s Ball* is one that embodied the characteristics of the stereotypical Tragic Mulatta. In this role, Berry became the first African-American to win an Oscar for Best Actress in a Leading Role. Leticia is largely a combination of the Tragic Mulatta and Jezebel stereotypes. The film is about a woman (Berry) whose husband is in prison on death row, and a correctional officer (Billy Bob Thornton) who is an employee of executing crew that will preside over her husband’s execution. Berry and Thornton’s characters come into each others life through a tragic and unique bond. She is a victim of her circumstance and dependent on those around her to get out of her situation. Her character says at one point in the film, “I’ve been coming here eleven years and I’m tired.” In that way, she is The Tragic Mulatta, and appears to be helpless. The film does not do
a lot to support how she came to be in her current situation, nor how she intends to get out of it, only that she is restless with it. She shamelessly gives herself to Billy Bob Thornton’s character and allows him control in their sexual interaction. In this way she is the Jezebel, not only did she initiate their sexual encounter, but she willingly submitted herself to what he wanted and gave no resistance. The Tragic Mulatta is a helpful character and the Jezebel is an empowered character, and Berry’s character is a combination of contradictions but more so fits the Jezebel stereotype than any other. There are other aspects to her character that could be likened to the Sapphires. For example, her dominating control over her son could be viewed in that way, but in some ways he is just ill-treated by her. There is a scene in the film when she is fired by her employer that show signs of her having Sapphire-like tendencies as she talks back to him and voices her dislike at being fired.

*Dreamgirls* (2006)

Jennifer Hudson’s character, Effie White, is the most multi-layered of all the characters seen in the films examined for this study. Effie is a combination of the Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel stereotypes. Effie, like Oda Mae Brown, is not your typical Mammy, and initially is not obliged to serve anyone, rather Effie is viewed as the least attractive and the heaviest of her singing group.

Effie is very much the Sapphire stereotype because she is a very no-nonsense, straight-to-the-point, and assertive woman. She has a fiery, outspoken personality and attitude to match. For much of the film, she is a strong presence on-screen and commands the attention of the audience and those around her. She has a boyfriend in the film who she is very comfortable with until their relationship begins to change. His role as her manager begins to grow more powerful, and he begins to make executive decisions, one of which included demoting her from lead singer to back-up singer. Her strong personality and presence made this a hard transition for her and her jealousy and erratic behavior eventually lead to her dismissal from the group.

The final stereotype Effie represented was that of the Jezebel. She is not completely sexualized in the usual manner of the Jezebel stereotype, but she does exhibit the characteristics of pursuing a man and being sexual.

**Methodology**

The researcher employed qualitative research methods to understand and analyze the topic for this research study. Through various texts, articles, and films, the researcher was able to gain an in-depth understanding of the portrayal of African-Americans in films. The perspectives used to interpret the data included the racial and ethnic stereotypes of the Mammy, Tragic Mulatta, Sapphire, and Jezebel characters. The researcher was able to
conclude that two stereotypes, the Mammy and Tragic Mulatta, have been shown on-screen for more than 90 years.

The researcher selected the four aforementioned films because they met the following requirements. First and most importantly, each had an African-American female actress awarded an Oscar for her role in the chosen film. The next criterion was identifying and defining what stereotypes were physically visible in the characters and which were intrinsically observed in the characters’ actions. Each of the films had success at the box office, which equates to large viewership and, perhaps, the power of enduring stereotypes in America.

This paper reflects the researcher’s analysis of two important books: *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks* (Bogle 1973) and *Shifting: The Double Lives of Black Women in America* (Charisse Jones and Kumea Shorter-Gooden 2004). By reading and analyzing the works of Bogle, this researcher was able to ascertain which stereotypes were most dominant in the films analyzed and which stereotypes wavered over time. Pilgrim’s articles (2000, 2002) further supported the current definitions of the stereotypes, the Mammy and Tragic Mulatta. The text *Shifting: The Double Lives of Black Women in America* (2004), gave another perspective to understanding African-American women’s experiences that was applied in the present research.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

As discussed earlier in this paper, the researcher reviewed and analyzed four films in which African-American actresses won an Oscar (*Gone with the Wind* (1939), *Ghost* (1990), *Monster’s Ball* (2001), and *Dreamgirls* (2006)). Each was analyzed to understand what stereotypes of African-American women were present in the films, how the stereotypes have changed over time, and which stereotypes were most prevalent. Each of the films contain one or more of the stereotypes identified and defined separately by Bogle (1973), Pilgrim (2002, 2002), and Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2004). During review of the films, it became clear to the researcher that stereotypes could be physically embodied as well as definitively represented. This means that a character can look the way a stereotype is described but not act in the way the stereotype is defined or act the way a stereotype is defined but not look that way.

*Gone with the Wind* (1930) saw Hattie McDaniel’s portrayal of the Mammy combine elements of the Mammy stereotype with that of the Sapphire stereotype. McDaniel definitively embodied the physical characteristics of the Mammy and the action-oriented elements as well. She behaved in the manner befitting to a Mammy character as defined by Bogle (1973); however, she had an edge to her character that touches on elements of the Sapphire.
By observing this film and understanding the combination of the two stereotypes, the researcher understood that the first and oldest of the four films analyzed brought about new viewpoints for analyzing the remaining three films.

_Ghost_ (1990) depicted a character who combined the Mammy and Sapphire stereotypes. Whoopi Goldberg’s character embodied the defined aspects of the Mammy in that she was loyal and committed to doing the bidding of Swayze’s ghost. However, Whoopi Goldberg’s Oda Mae Brown was not the typical submissive and obedient Mammy. Oda Mae was quite resistant to helping Swayze’s ghost and wanted no part of the situation. He pestered and hounded her to the point of her finally agreeing to help him. However, even after agreeing, she was not happy to do it and would just as soon end her involvement. Her agreement, however, and eventual unyielding loyalty does characterize Oda Mae as the Mammy. She was dressed and portrayed as an asexual character not to be viewed in a sensual or attractive manner. In every other way Goldberg’s character can be viewed as the Sapphire stereotype. She was loud, unruly at times, and in particular scenes strategically placed to make those around her look better and more refined. She also was quick-witted and had no shame in or problem with getting smart with someone. In this assessment Oda Mae Brown was just another Mammy/Sapphire combination. What sets Oda Mae’s Mammy/Sapphire combination apart is her on-screen experience that reflects the same experience African-American women experience in society known as “shifting,” illustrated in the following example. At a point in the film, Oda Mae Brown needs to dress up and downplay certain parts of her personality in order to withdraw some money from a bank. She purposefully quiets down so as not to offend the bankers assisting her and she tries to be as inconspicuous as possible in the scene. In doing so, she successfully completes the task at hand, withdraws the money and is able to leave the bank without a problem. This depiction of the phenomenon of shifting bridges an off-screen experience to an on-screen depiction and marks a change between the way the stereotypes evolved between the making of the films _Gone with the Wind_ (1939) and _Ghost_ (1990).

_Monster’s Ball_ (2001) saw Halle Berry’s Leticia Hargrove as the Tragic Mulatta and Jezebel. She was very much viewed as a victim of her circumstance. She physically portrays the Tragic Mulatta, appearing to be light-skinned and pitiful. However, her portrayal of the Jezebel is the main stereotype depicted in the movie. It is shot in a highly sexualized and deeply sensual manner showing Leticia as a sexual creature. Although for much of the film her actions and physical representation are that of the Tragic Mulatta, in the climatic part of the film she is suddenly thrown head-first into the definitive Jezebel role. She offers herself to a man and sexually pursues him to get what
she wants, and asks him “…to make me feel good”. When this scene occurs, Berry’s character becomes the physical and action-oriented representation of the Jezebel, and this makes her character a hybrid of the Tragic Mulatta and Jezebel stereotypes.

*Dreamgirls* (2006) saw Jennifer Hudson’s Effie White as a combination of the Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel stereotypes. She is physically representative of the Mammy stereotype, overweight, round, and seen as minimally attractive in comparison to her bandmates. Although she looks like the image you might expect from a Mammy stereotype, Effie does not see herself as unattractive and is not blatantly treated as such until later in the film. This character also has something that is out of character for a Mammy: a relationship. She does have definitive representations of the Sapphire stereotype, she is loud, unruly, and does at times make those around her look more polished. There is a scene in the film where Effie is auditioning a new song for a record executive in which she is loud, unruly, and seems to come on a little strong to the executive. She is the most conspicuous person in the room. Initially, her romantic relationship is balanced, but her Sapphire edge starts to diminish and she begins to act in ways that contradict her natural character. She is still outspoken and assertive, but rather than being seen as strengths these traits are viewed as pathetic and shows her as vulnerable. Her portrayal of the Jezebel bridges the three stereotypes. She is proud to be with her man and to have love. There is not a lot about love mentioned in earlier portrayals of the Jezebel, but each of Hudson’s stereotypical portrayals are somewhat of a departure from the general definitions and this sets Effie apart in portrayal from similar roles.

**Conclusion**

The researcher concludes that the most commonly seen stereotypes in the four films and analyzed for this study are the Mammy and Sapphire stereotypes. The next most commonly seen type is the Jezebel, and lastly the Tragic Mulatta. The first of the four films (*Gone with the Wind*) started with stereotypes being combined, which later proved to be the trend for all four of the films. As the films moved from the 20th to the 21st century, the Jezebel stereotype became strongly observed in *Monster’s Ball* and *Dreamgirls* yet not observed in *Gone with the Wind* and *Ghost*. The researcher concludes that although the Mammy image is stereotypical in nature, it is still one that cares about others and nurtures. The first film portrays this in Mammy’s loyalty to her master and his family and the affectionate banter she enjoys with Scarlet O’Hara.
The Jezebel stereotype is becoming more prominently seen in the films and the actresses playing these roles are being awarded Oscars for these films. As more time passes, Oscars seem to be awarded to African-American women for roles that are sexual in nature and not nurturing. The Mammy is a nurturing image at heart, while the Jezebel is sexual and unconcerned. These critically acclaimed films receive attention when they win these awards and the nurturing aspect of character portrayal is slowly phasing out. Oscars should be awarded to African-American women for roles that are non-stereotypical and convey positive imagery to the audience. Each of the characters analyzed in this study were strongly portrayed and allowed the actresses an opportunity to express themselves.

The researcher concludes that it important to know how African-American actresses are being portrayed in films because as the times change the awarding of portrayals of African-American women should change as well. There could be more parallels shown on-screen of how women have evolved off-screen. Many women are now writers, directors, and producers in their own right and this is not what is being seen in Oscar-winning films. Instead of rewarding portrayals of stereotypes, there should an emphasis placed on erasing or debunking these stereotypes. The researcher observes that stereotypes present in 1939 are still present in 2006. They have evolved through the times, but the Mammy, observed in the film *Gone with the Wind* (1939), is still present in *Dreamgirls* (2006). However, the stereotypes have expanded to be characterized in different ways. As expressed earlier in the paper, these stereotypes can be visual and/or action-oriented. This is significant because these stereotypes can be lurking beneath the surface and easily missed by the viewing public as stereotypes, when in actually they are perpetuating stereotypes.
REFERENCES


